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AIRMAIL

July 26, 1982.

Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin.

Attention: Mr. Sean Whelan, Press Section

Press Coverage: Prior Visit/London Bombings

Mr. Gormey,
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prior file 5/12/82
and New York
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Bus
Mr. Neligan
Mr. Burke
MS Hennessy
D/T Murray
Smith
London

The London car bombings and the visit to the U.S. of Mr. James Prior, Northern Ireland Secretary of State were the subject of substantial media coverage in the United States during last week. Prior had come to the U.S. on a double ticket of promoting his political solution in Northern Ireland and advertising Northern Ireland as a location for industrial investment. What would have otherwise been a low key not particularly noteworthy visit in the summer doldrums became a major media opportunity for Prior given the coincidence of the London bombings and his presence in the U.S. He used this opening to condemn the IRA, asked Americans not to support organisations involved in financing the IRA and specifically Noraid and to publicise and seek support for his "rolling devolution" proposal as a way forward in the current circumstances in Northern Ireland.

Prior was given substantial opportunities in the media, particularly in the electronic media. On this level he would undoubtedly claim his visit a success. He appeared on two of the major morning television shows, ABC's Good Morning America and NBC's Today Show. On both of these occasions and against the background of the London bombings he condemned the IRA and put forward his Assembly as a way forward. He appeared very much as a man with a solution in his hand - albeit a not totally perfect one - against the continuing chaos generated by the IRA. While Prior was appearing on ABC and NBC the leader of the SDLP John Hume was appearing live from Dublin on CBS Morning News. It was particularly helpful to have an alternative voice to Prior's on these major American morning programmes.

Prior was also a guest on the highly prestigious late night ABC 'Nightline' programme. On this occasion however he had to share the bill with Joe Austin from Belfast who was interviewed before Prior. Prior did not have an opportunity to promote his political initiative on this programme or perhaps in the circumstances he chose not to do so. He concentrated exclusively on condemnation of the IRA.

The Department has already the transcripts of all Prior's major interviews together with John Hume's appearance on CBS.

In the newspapers the London bombings received extensive coverage. Most papers carried a reference to the Taoiseach's statement and the New York Times had part of the statement as their "quotation of the day" last Wednesday. Several papers editorialised on the subject. Some including the New York Daily News and the Boston Herald American concentrated exclusively on a condemnation of the IRA while others including particularly the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times and Christian Science Monitor nodded positively to Prior's proposals for an Assembly in Northern Ireland. In the circumstances of the London bombings there may have been a certain inevitability in the fairly uncritical look at what Prior was proposing. The New York Times which had earlier indicated to us that they would adopt a wait and see attitude to the Prior initiative were precipitated into print by the London bombings and suggested that the moment may be right in Northern Ireland for "a fresh try". The Times have insisted to us that this editorial stance was consistent with their previously adopted position of encouraging the British Government towards some form of political movement in Northern Ireland. While accepting that there may be some drawbacks to the Prior proposal the Times have indicated that they feel very strongly that "we should not trottle the baby in the cradle". In the same editorial the Times talks of the necessity to "drain the grievances that cause law abiding people to protect IRA murderers".

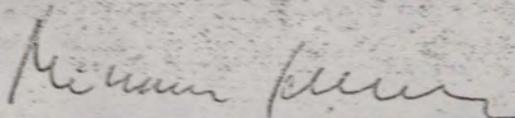
Against the background of the Prior visit and their editorial on Prior the Times did, nowever, today print a very useful Op-ed piece on the Prior initiative by Paul Arthur who is a senior lecturer in politics at the Ulster Polytechnic. This piece was published under the heading "Wrong Road in Ulster" and tells Times readers that Prior's initiative is "gravely flawed" and that "it cannot and will not work". Arthur's piece calls instead for a return to the Anglo-Irish process

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as the best way forward towards a solution and says that Prior's attempts "have deflected what appeared to be a promising effort to breakdown decades of suspicion between London and Dublin so they could work together on the problems of the North".

The Editorial in the Boston Globe on Sunday, 18 July has already been discussed in detail with the Department and an official reply appeared in the Boston Globe this morning.

Copies of some of the news coverage referred to above are attached for ease of reference.



Michael Collins
Press and Information Officer.

cc: Mr. J. Sharkey, Washington
Mr. P. Hennessy, London